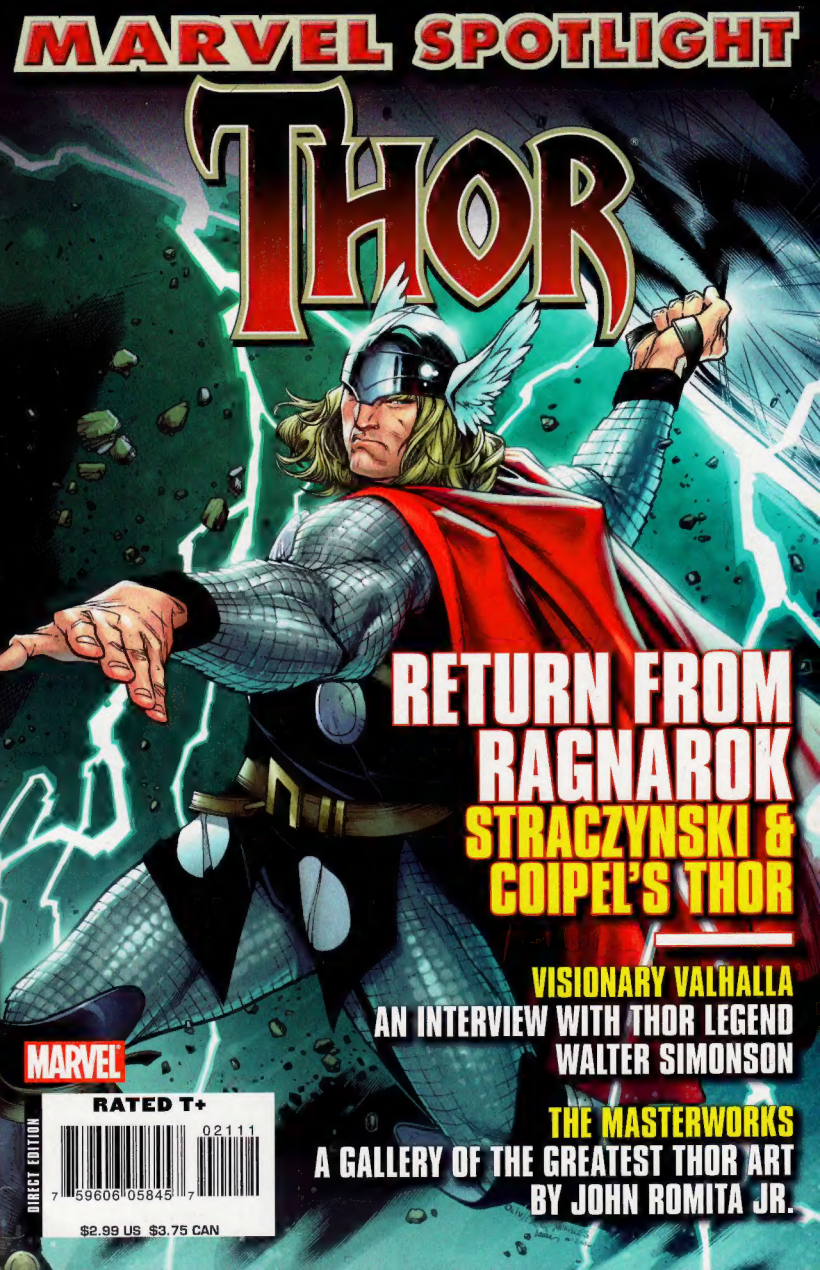
MARVEL SPOTLIGHT
THOR
RETURN FROM RAGNAROK
STRACZYNSKI & COIPEL'S THOR
VISIONARY VALHALLA
AN INTERVIEW WITH THOR LEGEND WALTER SIMONSON
THE MASTERWORKS
A GALLERY OF THE GREATEST THOR ART BY JOHN ROMITA JR.
MARVEL
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DIRECT EDITION
$2.99 US $3.75 CAN

PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

This issue of *Marvel Spotlight* seems to have been crafted by the gods and flown down to us from Asgard's hallowed halls by the Valkyries! Verily, we have a lineup of epic proportions, matching both the majesty of the Mighty Thor or the mass of the Voluminous Volstagg – take your pick! Feast your eyes on the contents of this awesome issue of *Spotlight* and then read on!

I: Restoring the Godhood: J. Michael Straczynski and Olivier Coipel's Thor

Reviving the legacy of Thor for an all-new era is surely a formidable task, but one that is in safe hands with the superstar creator of hit TV series *Babylon 5* and longtime *Amazing Spider-Man* writer. We have J. Michael Straczynski on hand to chat about the new *Thor* title, and a sketch gallery of Olivier Coipel's stirring take on the God of Thunder!

II: Visionary Valhalla: The Spotlight Interview With Walter Simonson

Marvel Spotlight is proud to present an interview conducted by Robert Greenberger with the comics creator perhaps most closely associated with the legend of Thor, the great Walter Simonson. We're not worthy!

III: Fashion Spotlight on… Asgard!

Out of the closet and onto the catwalk! *Spotlight*'s Jeph York does his best Mister Blackwell and sizes up the greatest fashions of fabled Asgard, answering the question, "Did Volstagg really wear white after Labor Day?!?!"

IV: The Masterworks – A Gallery of the Greatest Thor Art: John Romita, Jr.

In another of the "we're not worthy" entries in this illustrious issue of *Spotlight* is an art commentary by writer Dan Jurgens devoted to the art of his friend and fellow artist John Romita Jr. These two gentlemen collaborated on a seriously glorious run on *Thor* in the late '90s, where every pitch Dan would throw towards the plate, JR would swat right out of the park. With nearly every page of this run a masterwork, Dan has lots to talk about!

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SPOTLIGHT ON THOR

Marvel's first and greatest god made his premiere appearance in 1962's *Journey Into Mystery*. His battle with the Stone Men of Saturn was only the beginning of the Thunder God's legacy of timeless stories. From Stan Lee and Jack Kirby to JMS and Olivier Coipel, Thor has attracted some top-shelf creators who have responded to the challenge of telling the many stories of a Norse god and his love affair with mortal Earth!

COLLECT 'EM IN TRADE:

1960s:

■ **MIGHTY THOR MASTERWORKS VOL. 1-6**

Dr. Don Blake smacked an oddly shaped walking stick against the ground and a whole world opened up to him – and Marvel readers had a new hero! Fabled Asgard and Norse mythology were the backdrop against which luminaries Stan Lee and Jack Kirby crafted one of the very first forays into the new breed of super hero on the block – the Marvel Age hero! Thor's early adventures had him floating back and forth between Earth and Asgard, with Loki, Odin, Balder and the Warriors Three adding comedy, crisis and color all along the way! The Masterworks reprint the first several years worth of Thor stories in a series of full-color deluxe hardcovers.

■ **ESSENTIAL THOR VOL. 1-3**

It's all the adventures of Thor from his first appearance through Thor #166, all delivered in the far-out black and white phonebooks you love! These aren't just stories you're gonna want to read – they're Essential!

1970s:

■ **THE ETERNALS SAGA VOL. 1-2 TPB**

When the gods of Asgard meet the gods of Earth, anything can happen. And what happens when "anything" includes all-out war?

If you're a mortal, that means find a place to hide, hunker down, and read all about it when the trade comes out! An all-star lineup of classic comic talent including Roy Thomas, John Buscema, Mark Gruenwald and Walter Simonson bring this melding of two Marvel Universe pantheons to life in these two full-color trade paperbacks!

1980s:

■ **THOR VISIONARIES: WALTER SIMONSON VOL. 1-4 TPB**

Simply one of the greatest extended runs in Marvel Comics history, courtesy of a writer/artist who was on the top of his game writing a character he was born to write. Walter Simonson's vital new take on Thor literally saved the title from cancellation and transformed readers' notions of what a Thor comic could be. The fourth trade is hot on the stands, with the fifth and final collection on the horizon.

1990s:

■ **THOR VISIONARIES: MIKE DEODATO, JR. VOL. 1 TPB**

Warren Ellis and Mike Deodato's stirring run of pre-Heroes Reborn Thor is a highlight of mid-90s Marvel Comics!

2000s:

ACROSS ALL WORLDS TPB

■ **VOL. 1: THE DEATH OF ODIN TPB**

■ **VOL. 2: LORD OF ASGARD TPB**

■ **VOL. 3: GODS ON EARTH TPB**

■ **VOL. 4: SPIRAL TPB**

■ **VOL. 5: THE REIGNING TPB**

■ **VOL. 6: GODS AND MEN TPB**

With art talent like Stuart Immonen, Joe Bennett, Andy Kubert and Tom Raney at his disposal, writer Dan Jurgens was in great shape spinning the several years worth of Thor yarns that are compiled in this series of trades, including the death of Odin to the rise of Thor, Lord of Asgard. Be warned: some of them are very hard to find!

■ **AVENGERS DISASSEMBLED: THOR TPB**

Writer Michael Avon Oeming and artist Andrea DiVito worked magic on the series that laid Thor's soul to rest after a bad case of Ragnarok…and fans were cheering it as a modern masterpiece!

■ **LOKI HC/TPB**

■ **THOR: BLOOD OATH HC/TPB**

■ **STORMBREAKER: SAGA OF BETA RAY BILL TPB**

■ **THOR: VIKINGS TPB**

If you only buy one book this year that doesn't star Thor, it had better be Robert Rodi and Esad Ribic's gorgeous, elegiac tale of the Thunder God's sinister stepbrother, *Loki*. It's a comics masterpiece! Plus, check out Garth Ennis' wildly over-the-top MAX mini gorefest *Thor: Vikings*!

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Restoring the GODHOOD:

J. Michael Straczynski Revives the Mighty Thor

BY CHRIS ARRANT

The tales of Thor and his mighty hammer, Mjolnir, have been on hold, waiting for creators worthy of the legacy. The day has come: JMS and artist Oliver Coipel are forging the Thunder God's destiny in exciting new directions.

Norse god. Super-hero. Avenger. Legend.

In the Marvel Universe, the name Thor is one that has become one of its pillars. But since the aftermath of the Asgardian armageddon known as Ragnarok, which brought his own series to a conclusion several years back, Thor has been absent. Through the House of M and Civil War events there have been questions about his whereabouts, and even a clone imposter nicknamed 'Clor', but the real deal has been nowhere to be found.

Until now.

In their new ongoing series launched earlier this year, writer J. Michael Straczynski and artist Olivier Coipel have resoundingly brought down the hammer in the new adventures of Thor. Broad-shouldered and square-jawed, it's not only Coipel's artwork that has revitalized the Norse god for the Marvel Universe. In the hands of J. Michael Straczynski, genially referred to as "JMS," the character of Thor has flourished with a life-changing quest, new motivations, and a vocabulary expanded from the "Thees" and "Thous" that some felt plagued him before. In truth, this new series brings the character in line with the lofty expectations of a comic book version of the mighty Norse god of Thunder and War.

In his autobiography *Excelsior!*, co-creator Stan Lee explained that Marvel's Thor was created to stand out amongst his super hero brethren. "I wanted to come up with something totally different. I thought it would fun to invent someone as powerful as, or perhaps even more powerful than, the Incredible Hulk. But how do you make someone stronger than the strongest human? It finally came to me: Don't make him human – make him a god."

Thor's back...and has a lot of catching up to do.

SPOTLIGHT: This new series follows in the footsteps of the proverbial end of Thor, as he and the other Asgardians went through Ragnarok, the foretold end of their civilization. But Donald Blake found Thor, and we've discovered that there are new beginnings post-Ragnarok for Thor. Seeing as how Thor knew how his life was mapped out before, how is he approaching this new unwritten chapter of his life?

JMS: I think he's trying to be very careful in what he does, and what and who he wakes up. If as Blake says the cycle of Ragnarok is truly broken, then that means they now have total free will in creating their future. He wants to work that future out as much as he can in a constructive way...though unfortunately not every good deed or intent works out as planned. There's something that can backfire on you when you try to control too much, and try to exclude some things that you feel may be counter-productive. He wants the Asgardians back, but he desperately does not want Loki back, and he's not sure about Odin yet. Maybe he'll be successful in that plan. Maybe not.

SPOTLIGHT: What's the big picture for this new Thor series?

JMS: A large part of the story involves both rediscovering and reinterpreting his godhood, but also reacquiring his ties to humanity, since it was that love of our species that has kept him here for so long. He needs, wants to bring back Asgard, but wants it closer than before to his loved home Earth, feels that they have lost something by being so removed. So he begins that process, and selects Oklahoma for a number of reasons including the fact that it has vast open spaces large enough to accommodate the primary city of Asgard. Any place else would get flattened. And putting it somewhere in Antarctica would defeat the larger point.

SPOTLIGHT: The first issue sets up a revitalizing mission for Thor – a quest in the medieval sense, that brings him back to life. How would you explain this new status quo?

JMS: The first issue found Thor in what is essentially a kind of limbo, between life and death and something greater and more profound. He is offered both an opportunity and a challenge, a chance to fight his way back to finish the work he began. We also use the same process to re-introduce Donald Blake, who raises the question: "Is it for the gods to say when men die, or for men to say when the gods die?" Answering that question is a large part of what propels Thor back into the world of the living.

SPOTLIGHT: In the original announcement, you described Thor as "a big mythological show," stating that's it's very much in your "wheelhouse," Can you tell us how the series falls squarely in your favorite territory?

JMS: I've always had a real fondness for mythology; as a kid when other kids were out hanging in the schoolyard, I was reading books on Greek, Roman, Norse and Native American mythology. My love of myth dovetailed with my interest in early Greek thought, which in turn manifested itself in getting a Philosophy minor when I got my degree in Clinical Psychology. I have a very extensive library of mythology here at the house, and it's just something I find very revealing; myths, and the

IF HE BE WORTHY: Thor brings Mjolnir back to life! (Art from *Thor* #2.)

structure of classical mythology, are part of our desire to understand the universe, but they are also a reflection of ourselves; the gods are us writ large. When we look at them we look at ourselves, and playing in the world of mythology lets me turn a mirror to our own flawed humanity in ways that might not otherwise be acceptable.

SPOTLIGHT: In this new chapter of Thor's life, you've squarely placed him in American life rooting himself into the heartlands of Oklahoma. With the previous iteration of Thor being very stand-offish to mortal men and his human alter-ego being very minimalized, how does your approach in this series differ?

JMS: Thor wants to do some rethinking of his relationship with humanity, and he can't do that reexamination if the only people he hangs out with are super powered individuals. He needs to go back to the roots. So when he first relates to humans, he isn't sure how to handle it. He's very distant after his return to Earth, though he wants to be otherwise...like a feral cat that wants to make a place in your home but can't overcome the template of his instincts. He and the town are going to have to grow to a better understanding of one another, and it's going to be a mutual, difficult, awkward process.

VISIONS OF RAGNAROK: Thor and Don Blake reckon with the fate of Sif, Beta Ray Bill, Valkyrie and the legions of Asgard. (Art from *Thor #1*.)

Again, though, this goes back to the nature of ancient mythology, where the gods and goddesses weren't always up on Olympus or Asgard or elsewhere, they strode the same fields as humans, and often ran into them, with often complicated or tragic consequences. I want to go back to that.

SPOTLIGHT: Your connections to Marvel's *Thor* goes back, way back, to the very beginning with *Journey To Mystery #83* back in 1962 which you bought as a young fan. Was Stan & Jack's rendition of Thor the first time you came across the mythological character?

JMS: No, again I was exposed to Thor the mythological figure long before I ran into him in Journey into Mystery. But when I found him there I thought it was just the coolest thing and I do find the Thor/Blake dynamic to be the purest iteration of the character, since that's what those who created him thought would be cool, and I want to honor that and go back to it and see if I can bring it back strong.

SPOTLIGHT: Although we're just three issues into the series, I've already been struck by your increased attention to Thor's human side, that of Donald Blake. Can you tell us how you hold that character in your thoughts, and his relation to Thor?

JMS: Blake's been through a lot, both in the years when he was technically present, and then when he was erased and then restored. He's come away from that experience with a more profound perspective...wiser, sharper, and maybe a little harder. He's not just someone whose presence can be a weight to Thor, he's someone who can be a real partner, a complement to Thor on a different level. I want Blake to drive some of the stories.

So for that reason I'm going to have Blake get involved in groups like Doctors Without Borders, which will plunge him into situations where he and Thor might make a huge difference... sometimes more one than the other.

SPOTLIGHT: Thor's alter-ego Donald Blake has also struck up acquaintances with some of the townsfolk in the Oklahoma town near the re-located Asgard. They have been surprisingly genial since Asgard showed up on their doorstep. How can they relate to a Norse god, and separately to Thor's alter-ego of Donald Blake?

"A large part of the story involves both rediscovering and reinterpreting his godhood, but also reacquiring his ties to humanity..."

– Writer J. Michael Straczynski on story themes of the new Thor series.

GOD OF THUNDER: The lightning crashes in his wake! (From *Thor #2*.)

THOR VS. IRON MAN: Black and white pencil and inks of a historic battle between Avengers! (Art from *Thor #3*.)

JMS: There's the stereotype that folks in Oklahoma or places of that sort might be less than welcoming to strangers, but in fact I think that while you'll find some of that, others pride themselves on their friendliness and ability to be open to new people. I want to do a scene where there's a town meeting and you have the Asgardians sitting on one side of the school gym, the townsfolk on the other, and between them...cake (which Volstagg would love). Yes, there's going to be conflict, but also compassion, as we saw when Beth Sooner noted that Thor must be awful lonely up there in an empty Asgard. Blake, by contrast, will become a real asset in the town, which could use a good doctor.

SPOTLIGHT: Virtually throughout his entire history in the Marvel Universe, Thor's been a character out of time and place - what would you say his perspective is on Earth in the new series?

JMS: Initially, he's distant, trying to figure out where he fits in again. We're going to really power Thor up, give him all the strength of his heritage, and that can kind of put you apart the very human race you want to rediscover. He doesn't want to get pulled into the other groups, he wants to do his own thing...the question he has to answer is, what is that? And why? To a large extent, what he finds in the people of Oklahoma will help to answer some of those questions.

SPOTLIGHT: In this modern version of *Thor*, you've eschewed the "Thee's" and "Thou's" of Thor's dialogue for a more measured and classical language. How'd you get to this point?

JMS: Again, I came at this from very early roots in myth and history, and I could never understand even as a kid why a Norse god would speak in Quasi-Medieval English. It just doesn't parse, so to speak. And I think that over the years that has been off-putting for a lot of potential readers. So I'm going for more of a sense of antiquity in the grammar and style, to try and make him sound formal and distant and ancient but without resorting to thees and thous. The closest tonal parallel would be Aragon in *Lord of the Rings*. The sense of dialog there has the feeling of formality and otherness, but without resorting to tricks.

It's harder, actually, because you have to be constantly cognizant of structure and tone and sentence construction to maintain that, when it's easier to just throw in a few thees and thous, but in the long run I think it'll be worth the effort.

SPOTLIGHT: Sitting around the proverbial water cooler that we comics journalists visit, a recurring conversation is about the origins of the book itself. Wizard Magazine went so far as to announce the book several years back with Mark Millar and Greg Land on the book, although it was premature. Even Neil Gaiman's name was bandied around before fate had you pick up the gauntlet. From your perspective, how did it end up in your hands?

JMS: Tinkers to Evers to Chance. The progression started with Neil, who had some great ideas (as he always does), then when that didn't work out for logistical reasons, it bounced back to the group. I mentioned the image of the hammer falling in Oklahoma, and Mark leapt right for it (meanwhile I'm like, "Hello, am I chopped liver here?"), but Mark also had to bow out for similar

"Myths, and the structure of classical mythology, are part of our desire to understand the universe, but they are also a reflection of ourselves; the gods are us writ large."
– JMS

IF HE BE UNWORTHY: In the Road to Civil War issues of *Fantastic Four*, Dr. Doom discovered Mjolonir in the barren backroads of Oklahoma. (Cover to *FF* #537.)

reasons. It then came back to the group, and I jumped in and grabbed the book in a death-grip. I'll be honest; I was kinda hoping that would happen because I've always been a big fan of Thor and his mythology, which I really wanted to explore.

SPOTLIGHT: A monumental battle in the making – any chance to see *Civil War*'s Clor face off with Odinson, Thor?

JMS: Could be.

SPOTLIGHT: How do you think Thor's absence from the Marvel Universe for several years has played into your series and his return?

JMS: I think it kind of clears the decks a bit...time passing to clear the palate before the next serving.

SPOTLIGHT: An interesting fact that not many people know about is that when you found out Marvel Studios, the film arm of Marvel Entertainment, was working on a movie adaptation of *Thor*, you sent in a full script on spec; that is, without getting hired or paid to do it. First off, what made you jump at that chance?

JMS: Again, I'm a fan, first and foremost. Figured the odds then were pretty small of getting it through, but I had to take the chance or kick myself forever.

SPOTLIGHT: Second, what do you think are the core principles of Thor that would make a great movie?

JMS: His strength, his relation to humanity, his shared time with Blake, his unshakeable convictions on what's right, his dedication to his real and extended families, and the whole ambiance of Norse mythology.

SPOTLIGHT: After guiding the *Fantastic Four* title through the *Civil War* event and wrapping up your several-year-long run on *Amazing Spider-Man*, you're not only reviving *Thor* but you're also writing *The Twelve*, a 12-issue limited series reviving some long-forgotten Golden Age Timely/Marvel heroes. We also know you're a busy man with the recent *Babylon 5* DVD movie, working on the script for the *Silver Surfer* movie and having your own movie script, *The Changeling*, being helmed by Clint Eastwood.

JMS: Also just finished up adapting *World War Z* for Paramount and Brad Pitt's company, and I'm working on adapting *They Marched Into Sunlight* for Tom Hanks' company, with Paul Greengrass attached to direct.

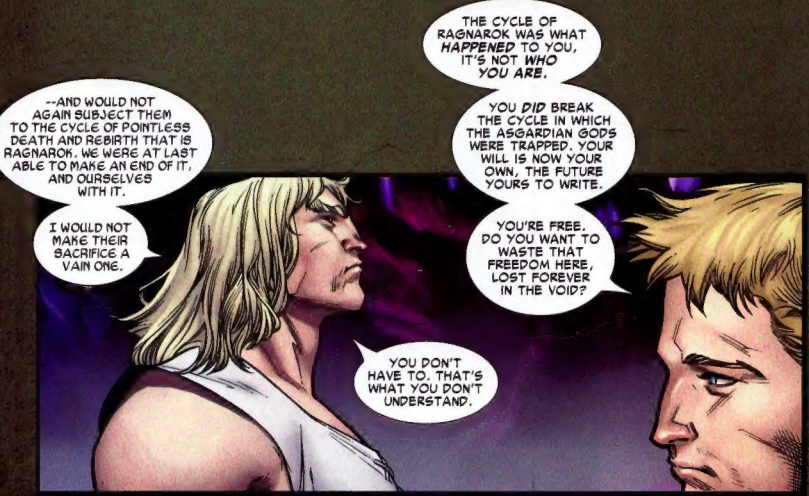
SPOTLIGHT: Congratulations, by the way.

JMS: Thanks.

SPOTLIGHT: With all that going on, what makes *Thor* something you wanted to stick with long-term?

JMS: Just a sense of real affection for the character, and a desire to see if I can mainstream the character in some ways, go more inside-the-comics-beltway in others, and try to make him more successful as a character and a book. It's a real challenge. In order to concentrate on *Thor* I've pulled way back on all my work for Marvel, from *Fantastic Four* to *Squadron Supreme* and others. I really want to do this right.

We're already three issues into the new Thor series and it's already a runaway hit with fans and critics alike. Scrounge up the first few issues if you haven't already and climb on board with THOR #4, shipping in October.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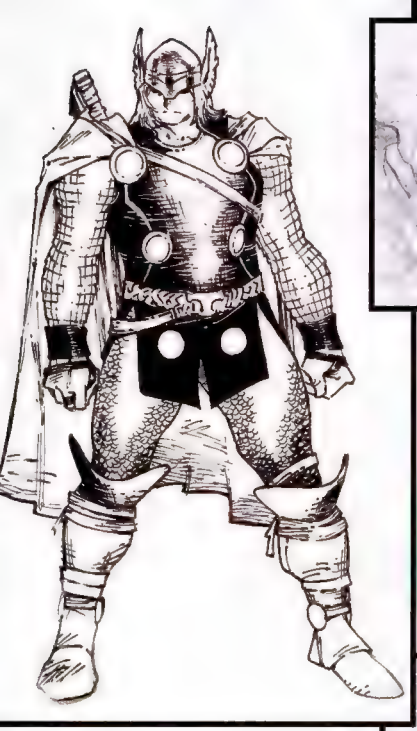
--AND WOULD NOT AGAIN SUBJECT THEM TO THE CYCLE OF POINTLESS DEATH AND REBIRTH THAT IS RAGNAROK. WE WERE AT LAST ABLE TO MAKE AN END OF IT, AND OURSELVES WITH IT.
YOU DID BREAK THE CYCLE IN WHICH THE ASGARDIAN GODS WERE TRAPPED. YOUR WILL IS NOW YOUR OWN. THE FUTURE YOURS TO WRITE.
I WOULD NOT MAKE THEIR SACRIFICE A VAIN ONE.
YOU'RE FREE. DO YOU WANT TO WASTE THAT FREEDOM HERE, LOST FOREVER IN THE VOID?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO. THAT'S WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.

BREAKING THE CYCLE: Thor and Don Blake discuss an important element of JMS' revitalization of Thor. (Art from *Thor #1*.)

OLIVIER COIPEL

Thor Character Designs

Olivier shared with *Spotlight* some character design sketches from the new revamp of *Thor*.



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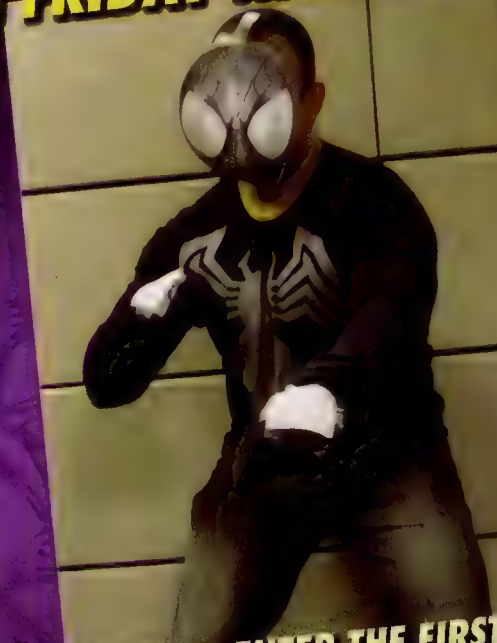

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Visions of Valhalla

The Spotlight Interview with Walter Simonson

During the 1980s, Marvel produced a small handful of writer/artist epics that not only helped define an era, but helped shape the future of the medium: Frank Miller's Daredevil, John Byrne's Fantastic Four, and Walter Simonson's Thor.

+ By Robert Greenberger +

There have been several celebrated runs by writers and artists on *Thor*, starting with the efforts from Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Vince Colletta stretching through to today's well-received work from J. Michael Strazcinski and Olivier Coipel. During the 1980s, though, Walter Simonson took a relatively moribund title and made it a top-selling book for Marvel that also benefited from people talking about the sweeping changes Simonson brought to the title from its very first issue (*Thor #337*). His run, which lasted through issue 382, not only boasted terrific stories and artwork, but brought out the best in his occasional collaborators, notably penciller Sal Buscema.

Recently, Simonson sat down with *Marvel Spotlight* to look back on his work, and reveals in detail how long he had been waiting to tell one particular story.

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SPOTLIGHT: How did you come to write and draw *Thor*?

WALTER: Mark Gruenwald, editor of the book, asked me. I was working regularly for Marvel at the time and I was up in the offices a lot. Those were the pre-FedEx days, pre-Internet. Pretty much you lived and worked around the places where comics were created and you went into the offices and you knew everybody. The people you worked with and for were part of your social set as well.

In my case, I was reading *Thor* comics back in the 1960s. And for me, the highlight of the run was from *Journey into Mystery* #114 through *Thor* #139 or thereabouts. That was the stuff I was really reading as it was being publishing, and I was blown away by it. I was inspired by it.

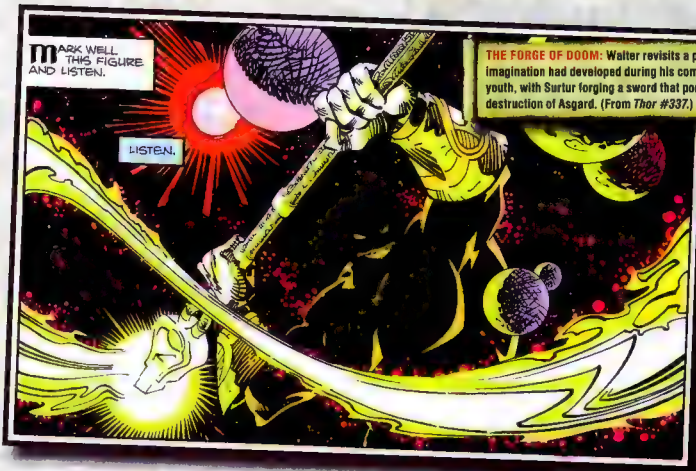
SPOTLIGHT: You're not alone. That was my favorite period, too.

WALTER: At the same time, I had discovered *Lord of the Rings* just before it came out in mass-market paperback. One of my English teachers actually loaned me his hardcover copies to read. A lot of fantasy then started to come out during the late 1960s and I was into it. So, around 1967-1968, I came up with my own idea for a Thor story. It was a mixture of actual Norse mythology, which I already knew, the Marvel mythology I was reading where Thor didn't have a red beard and red hair but had a big hammer and beat up on trolls, and "Simonson mythology."

I put together a story that "crossed" into all of Marvel's titles, which back then was around eleven titles. My idea was to have a story that would come out over the span of one month. There'd be an opening chapter in that month's *Thor* and an additional chapter in every other title from the same month. Then, the next month, the climax of the story would come out in the *Thor Annual*, which would be double-sized. This was way before the sort of major intra-company crossovers we have now.

SPOTLIGHT: What was the actual story?

WALTER: At that time in *Thor* there was a giant blade called the Odinsword, which sat in



THE FORGE OF DOOM: Walter revisits a plotline his imagination had developed during his comic-crazed youth, with Surtur forging a sword that portends the destruction of Asgard. (From *Thor #337.*)

"If *Thor* did poorly, well, it was doing poorly before. If it did well, they'd say, 'That Walt's a genius.'"

– Walter Simonson on the editorial mood surrounding *Thor* before his arrival as writer/artist

Asgard. It was introduced in the *Tales of Asgard* back-up feature right around *Journey into Mystery #117.* There was no history for it. It was basically a giant blade lying in a giant scabbard. The legend around it was that if someone ever withdrew the blade from the scabbard, the universe would end. It was used as the Macguffin in that story and a few other times in *Thor* - but it was never withdrawn entirely from the scabbard and it was never explained how the universe would end.

My contribution to that part of the story was to give the Odinsword a history. It was the blade of Surtur, (first introduced in *Journey Into Mystery* #97, October 1963) a fire elemental, one of the very first beings, who sat in a realm of flames. At the end of time, at Ragnarok, he would take a burning sword and set fire to the universe. I thought it would be cool if the Odinsword was really Surtur's blade, the one with which he would set fire to everything at the end of time.

My idea was that Asgard would wake up one morning and the sword would be gone. I treated the Odinsword much like Tolkien's One Ring. Sauron put a lot of his power into the One Ring. I thought that some of Surtur was in the blade. Odin had taken the sword from Surtur millennia ago, afraid that Surtur would try and destroy the universe before its time. Odin's main job, I thought, was working to delay the inevitable destruction of the universe even though he knows that eventually, it will come. So Surtur over the millennia created a great magic, unknown to Odin, and eventually he taps it. He calls the Odinsword out of Asgard, back to his own hands in Muspelheim.

Jack Kirby had done a pinup of Asgard, I believe, for one of the annuals. It was a two-page spread and he included the Eternal Flame of Asgard. I can't recall if it was ever used in a story but there it was. My thought was that Surtur has the sword, but he still has to light the sword. Once the sword is lit, nothing can stop him. And the deal is that the sword can only be lit in the Eternal Flame of Asgard. So even though he has the sword back, he had to go to Asgard to light it.

In that first issue of *Thor* everyone would wake up and find the sword gone. And we'd give the backstory on the sword and its significance. The remainder of the monthly comics would track Surtur from Muspelheim towards Earth en route to Asgard.

I didn't work out the other chapters; I had just worked out the origin and the climax for the annual. In each one of those middle chapters the heroes or teams would come across some aspect of Surtur. Maybe they slow him down but he always gets closer and closer to Asgard. In the annual, he actually arrives in Asgard and moves to light the sword.

I'm pretty sure, although I'm not positive, I discussed this with Mark as we shot the breeze one day.

SPOTLIGHT: So, this story had been rattling around in your mind since 1967.

WALTER: Yep. I had already drawn *Thor* for about a year around 1977-1978, with Len Wein as the writer/editor. I did layouts, Tony DeZuniga did finishes; we had a good time doing a very Stan Lee/Jack Kirby Thor.

By 1983, I had begun to do a little writing as well as drawing and Mark approached me about taking over both the writing and the drawing on *Thor*. At the time, the book wasn't doing well commercially. I think there was some talk about canceling it, but I don't know how serious the talk was. But Mark encouraged me to just go for it. I regret not having it anymore, but I remember Mark giving me a page and a half typewritten of possible storylines including killing him and giving someone else the hammer. He didn't want those stories in particular, he just wanted me to understand that I could do pretty much whatever I wanted to do. Essentially, I was given a blank slate. It was a no-lose situation.

CLASSIC COVER: The cover to *Thor #340*, one of several images from Walter's esteemed run.

If *Thor* did poorly, well, it was doing poorly before. If it did well, they'd say, "That Walt's a genius." (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: What sort of changes did you want to make visually?

WALTER: When I was reading Marvel comics, *Thor* was my favorite book. I bought all Marvel's comics but he was the one. The chance to do it as the writer as well as the artist was a pleasure. I had already drawn my Kirby Asgard with Len so I felt free to move in a slightly different direction. I didn't change the costumes of the main characters; I gussied some of them up. I used some variation of what Jack had done. Jack often created elaborate costumes and then as the characters hung around for a while, he simplified them. The Destroyer is a good example. I really, really liked his initial appearance in his very first panel in *Journey into Mystery* #118. Every panel after that, he got simpler and simpler so he became like a mummy with rings around him, which was okay, but in the original version, he had iron skirts and more elaborate riveting around the arms - even small spikes! I often went back to look at what Jack had originally done and used that or modified it. It was true of Balder, true of Sif, true of the Destroyer and so on.

I also reconsidered Asgard. Having done that earlier run, I had pretty much done the science fiction Asgard. When I started to do it as writer and artist, I felt a certain freedom to rethink it. As far as I know, there is no extant Viking architecture. What we do have are several surviving stave churches when Christianity came in at the end of the Viking era. They had these great pitched roofs, with dragonheads on the ridgepoles. I presumed they had something to do with the way other buildings looked before that. So basically, I used those stave churches to design my pagan heaven. (*Laughter.*)

I also felt that this was the opportunity to finally tell my Surtur story. But by the time I took over with *Thor* #337, the Odinsword had been destroyed back in issue 300. I thought about that and I didn't really want to do a story that said, "Oh look, that must have been a faux Odinsword. Here's the real one!" I just decided to have Surtur make his own sword. That was my backstory. And I ran a series of front stories as the new blade was being forged. My original plan was to wrap Surtur up with a double issue around 350. But I found I needed a little more room so in the end it took me to around 353.

"Nobody in 1983 was doing comics with the idea that eventually the stories would be collected into 200-page volumes. Accessible back issues were still a novelty. And you needed to carry the story on a monthly basis." - Walter Simonson

My main story arcs featured characters like Fafnir the dragon, Malekith the Dark Elf, Roger Willis and such, with Surtur as the sub-story arc for a length of issues. None of that was stuff I plotted fourteen years earlier. I was trying to write a series of shorter stories, one to four issues long that would eventually become the preeminent arc when I got Surtur to Asgard.

SPOTLIGHT: But the entire story began with Beta Ray Bill. How'd he fit in with your plans?

WALTER: (*Laughter.*) When I write comics, I would like them not to be the same story you've read a million times. I did comics for Marvel in the late 1970s, and we were all mostly still doing Stan Lee/Jack Kirby stories using a lot of old characters. There were many reasons for that, but by the early '80s we were kind of moving away from that.

My thought was that I wanted a story that didn't feel as if it had already been told: one more Thor fight with the Purple Pantywaist, or having the Cobra come back for the 45th time. Knowing Thor's history pretty well, I thought a good place to start was the notion of Thor's hammer. It's really a key part of his identity and it's got this neat little inscription on it, "Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor." The meaning of that inscription had really never been explored in the comic.

AND WITH THAT, THE GOD OF THUNDER IS GONE FROM THAT MID-MANHATTAN ROOFTOP— THE THONG OF HIS ENCHANTED HAMMER CLENCHED TIGHTLY IN HIS FIST— THE WARM GLOW OF TRIUMPH SPREAD ACROSS HIS CHISELED FEATURES—
"—FOR HE HAS FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT ONCE MORE, AND HIS HAS BEEN VICTORIOUS—"
"—AND, FOR THE MOMENT, ALL IS RIGHT WITH HIS WORLD!

FIRST THOR ART: This splashy image of Thor was from Walter's first run on the character in the late '70s. (From *Thor* #271.)

I figured someone new should pick up the hammer and we go from there. The hammer had been around for 20 years, real time, since *Journey into Mystery #83*, and no one in the Marvel Universe had picked it up. And I took that as an indication that no existing character in the MU back then COULD pick up the hammer, a belief I still hold, subsequent stories notwithstanding.

It had to be somebody brand new; given the inscription, it had to be somebody worthy, whatever that means. So I created a character that would have a tragic but heroic background, someone as selfless as Thor. And he would have to have a warrior background. Most, maybe all of those who have picked up the hammer in subsequent stories fail the Simonson test. And that's because in the Walt Simonson Universe, *Mjolnir* was really designed as a killing machine as it was in the myths. That hammer was designed to kill Frost Giants, the great enemies of the gods. Most of the characters who have picked up *Mjolnir*, well, the hammer would've recognized that they're not killers, they are not worthy. In the context of the hammer, worthy means a certain amount of bloodletting.

I needed someone who was a warrior, so I created someone who gave everything up to be the greatest warrior of his people. He was selfless because he was trying to save his entire race. He allowed himself through terrible, agonizing means to become a great weapon. In the end, that allowed the hammer to recognize this guy as worthy to use it.

That's really how the idea was developed.

SUDDENLY— WHOOSH— WHOOSH—
BUT THE GRIMLY PRIZED MAIDEN WHO'D SAVED HIM WAS DEAD AT LAST, SLAIN BY THE FOES SHE WOULD HAVE PROTECTED!
I KNOW I MUST BE WORTHY TO WIELD THIS HAMMER, BUT I'M NOT SURE I'M WORTHY OF THIS SACRIFICE!

SIF IN THE WILDERNESS: The early issues of Walter's run finds Thor's shield maiden lovelorn and looking for a good scrap…and she finds one! (Image from *Thor* #339.)

SPOTLIGHT: Bill was certainly an odd looking figure to be picking up the hammer.

WALTER: When you tell a story, you oftentimes lead the audience in one

ANOTHER IS WORTHY: The emergence of Beta Ray Bill as a worthy possessor of Mjolnir was a masterstroke by Walter…typically misunderstood at the time! (Image from *Thor #339.*)

meaning; if only I could monger symbols like that. But I did what I could.

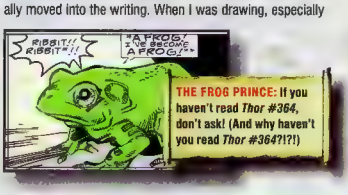
A very useful symbol back then was that good guys were handsome and bad guys were ugly. When I designed Beta Ray Bill, I designed him to look like a monster, I knew that most of the audience would see this ugly monster pick up the hammer and think that I had lost my mind. I have to say, it worked. I got all kinds of letters and to the last one, everyone crabbed about it. But everyone bought the comic, so my work was done. I created Bill in such a way that he was worthy to pick up the hammer and most of the audience didn't realize it initially. Their visual sense overrode their logical faculties. Nobody I heard from at the time got it; they all got it in hindsight.

To that end, I also decided that when Bill slapped the stick on the ground and it changed into a hammer, it also changed him into Thor's duds. I didn't give him an exact copy of Thor's costume, I fancied it up some. More symbol mongering. That was a visual cue to everyone in the audience about exactly what had just happened. It was a shorthand visualization of what Bill had become. And everybody got it.

SPOTLIGHT: You were among several writer/artists working in the 1980s and it seemed to be a growing trend. Was this something editorially designed?

WALTER: I think it was organic. I don't know if anyone at Marvel really had the thought that they were hunting for writer/artists. I do think that several creators came along at the time who could draw and also write. Frank, me, John Byrne, we were all guys who started out as artists first, who became writers as time moved on. I know there were guys who started as artists and moved on to writing, eventually abandoning the art. I think there is a job or two out there with Steve Englehart credited as artist, maybe one over at Warren. Len Wein and Marv Wolfman certainly started in that way.

Many of us started as artists and in my case very gradually moved into the writing. When I was drawing, especially



THE FROG PRINCE: If you haven't read *Thor #364*, don't ask! (And why haven't you read *Thor #364*?!?!)

direction and then allow them to discover that something else is going on over here. It's not about "A," it's about "B" and they're taken by surprise. You mislead your audience until you get to whatever kind of reveal you want to do to make the drama work.

Mostly, comics as a 22-page monthly medium work through a kind of shorthand. Nobody in 1983 was doing comics with the idea that eventually the stories would be collected into 200-page volumes. Accessible back issues were still a novelty. And you needed to carry the story on a monthly basis. So what we were doing at the time was using a lot of shorthand and a lot of symbols.

Once, many years ago, Frank Miller was pejoratively referred to in a comics magazine as a "symbol mongerer." I thought that was a marvelous phrase. They were right on the money but I thought they completely misunderstood what it meant. Frank was brilliant at creating shortcuts to

with *Battlestar Galactica*, I contributed a lot to the plotting. I enjoyed plotting stories with the writer, Roger McKenzie, and he was kind enough to let me help. I got experience putting together stories. Some writers didn't want much help and that was fine, others were happy to have me kibitz. That happened fairly early. On *Manhunter* with Archie Goodwin, the first couple of *Manhunter*s were done full script and somewhere along the lines we started discussing the stories and I was contributing ideas. It gave me some practice - and I was practicing with one of the best writers in comics at the time.

Maybe it was luck of the draw or the way the ether was blowing. Having gotten some guys who were doing pretty good work as writer/artists, it opened up editorial's eyes to giving more of these guys a shot.

SPOTLIGHT: Whatever happened, it worked. People were buzzing about Beta Ray Bill and the story and even turning Thor into a frog…

WALTER: (*Laughter.*) The frog story got the most ambivalent mail. We didn't get tons of mail, but we got mail and I did the letter columns. I read all the mail, picked the letters, and wrote the answers using Marvel's editorial voice. If I wanted to say something myself, I would step out of the editorial "voice" and very clearly be me responding.

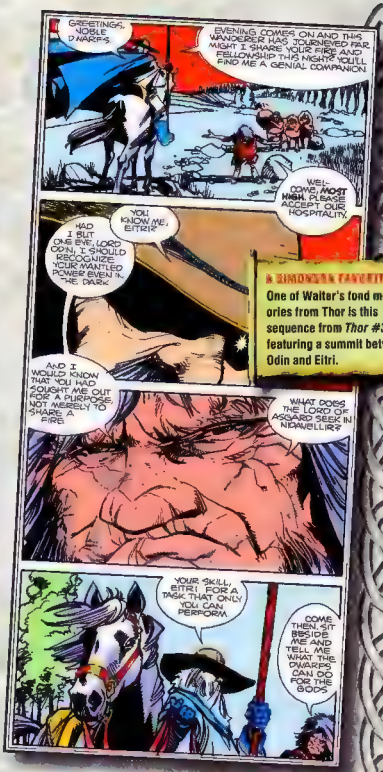
Mostly I was getting pretty positive letters but if you go back and look, you will see one crabby letter every issue. There were maybe four letters in the column and I was not getting 25 percent negative feedback. But the crabby letters always had something interesting to say so I tried to run one every month.

In the case of the frog story, the mail was fifty-fifty. Readers liked it or else they weren't sure what I was doing. Was I trying to be funny? They didn't write in to say they hated it; they wrote in to say they were kind of baffled by it. Thirty years later, of all the stories people mention to me when they talk to me about the *Thor* run, more often than not, I hear about the frog story. It has worn very well.

SPOTLIGHT: Looking back on the run, do think it has held up?

WALTER: I do, actually. I've never gone back and re-read the entire run. I occasionally go back and re-read half an issue. There are three or four scenes throughout the entire run that I'm very happy with. There's one where Odin goes off to find Eitri the dwarf because he wants to forge a new hammer. They sit by a fire talking about, in some ways, the relationship between the gods and the dwarves. It's an uneasy relationship because the gods created the dwarves but also drove them underground. I love that dialog and the bargain they strike has unexpected consequences. That's one of my favorites.

Certainly, styles of art have changed hugely since I did *Thor*. I don't know what a modern audience coming to it now would think. It's a very different kind of art and different kind of storytelling from what they've become accustomed to seeing. But all in all, the stories I told, the way I drew them, the lettering John Workman did, I think *Thor* holds up pretty well.


GREETINGS, NOBLE DWARFS.
EVENING COMES ON AND THIS WANDERER HAS JOURNEYED FAR. MIGHT I SHARE YOUR FIRE AND FELLOWSHIP THIS NIGHT? YOU'LL FIND ME A GENIAL COMPANION.
WELCOME, MOST HIGH. PLEASE ACCEPT OUR HOSPITALITY.
YOU KNOW ME, EITRI?
HAD I BUT ONE EYE, LORD ODIN, I SHOULD RECOGNIZE YOUR MANTLED POWER EVEN IN THE DARK.
AND I WOULD KNOW THAT YOU HAD SOUGHT ME OUT FOR A PURPOSE, NOT MERELY TO SHARE A FIRE.
WHAT DOES THE LORD OF ASGARD SEEK IN NIDAVELLIR?
YOUR SKILL, EITRI. FOR A TASK THAT ONLY YOU CAN PERFORM.
COME THEN. SIT BESIDE ME AND TELL ME WHAT THE DWARFS CAN DO FOR THE GODS.

A SIMONSON FAVORITE:
One of Walter's fond memories from Thor is this sequence from *Thor* #339, featuring a summit between Odin and Eitri.

SPOTLIGHT: Having done two stints with the character, if he were offered to you today, would you go back?

WALTER: I don't know. Down the road if the chance came again, I would give it consideration. There are a handful of characters if the stars were in alignment I would consider revisiting: Wonder Woman, Orion and the New Gods, with Thor among them.

Verily, we needs must thank Walter Simonson for discussing his epic run on *The Mighty Thor* with the merry miscreants of *Marvel Spotlight*! His entire 45-issue run, plus the 4-issue *Balder the Brave* limited series, is currently being reprinted in the THOR VISIONARIES: WALTER SIMONSON series of trade paperbacks!

Strutting down that most famous of fashion catwalks, the Rainbow Bridge, the finest fineries of Asgard are on display!

FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON...

ASGARD!

LO, across the vast and endless cosmos, let it never be said that *Marvel Spotlight* is all about substance over style! Heck, when it comes to gorgeous art and fantastic costumes, we're as shallow as they come! And since Thor and his extended family have sported some of the most iconic, outlandish, and just plain visually cool costumes in the Marvel pantheon, we thought we'd take a tour through the Asgardian closet for a look at some of the best of the bunch!

FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON:

THOR

Case in point – this little number. Although Thor's "standard" outfit has looked perfect on him for decades, and this chain-mail armor was only seen for a few issues, it remains one of fandom's favorite looks for Ol' Goldilocks. Why? Well, take a look for yourselves! Those golden arms … that hidden face … the enormous flared boots … those intricate pins holding on his cape … *that beard*!

WALT SIMONSON designed this little number for Thor in 1987 – and he hit it right out of the ballpark. Later artists have tried to update Thor's costume in various ways, incorporating all kinds of Norse detailing and doodads – but none of them have been able to surpass the power-packed imagery in every detail of Walt's armor. Commanding … regal … awe-inspiring … *this* is how a god should look when he goes into battle.

From Thor #378, April 1987

FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON:

ODIN

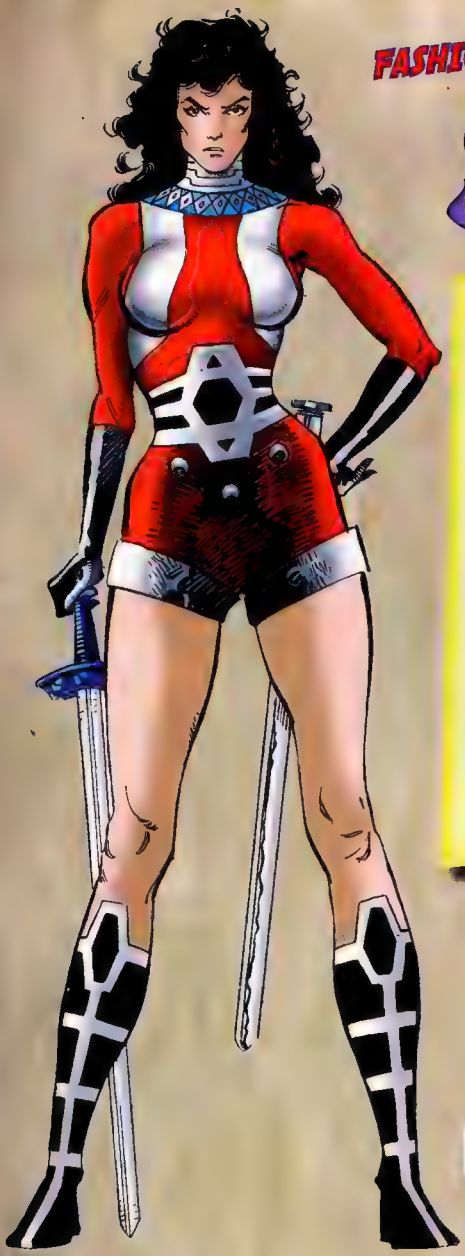
From Thor: Son of Asgard, 2004

Odin, Lord of Asgard, could give Sir Elton John a run for his money in terms of varied and ever-changing wardrobes. It seems like the guy changes outfits every issue – and each one is wilder than the last! Odin has dressed in intricately detailed Norse finery, he's sported multicolored Kirbytech armor – he's even worn fur shorts! (Hey, are *you* gonna tell the All-Father that he shouldn't be wearing fur shorts? Didn't think so!) In fact, there's a rumor going around that a full Two of the Nine Worlds are taken up by Odin's wardrobe chamber.

But one thing's for certain: Asgard's bearded ruler cuts quite an impressive figure no matter what he's wearing.

This outfit, designed by **GREG TOCCHINI**, is a prime example – a combination of woven cloth and fine chainmail, hardened battle armor and majestic flowing cloak (and hey, is that a *kilt*?) It all adds up to lend Odin the commanding presence he needs to rule over his charges – and intimidate the many enemies of Asgard. Imagine facing down a god dressed like that, and wielding the Odin-power, on the field of battle … admit it, you'd consider surrendering too.

Power – wisdom – and fashion sense. Truly, Lord Odin doth have it all. Now, if we can just do something about his fur shorts…



FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON:

SIF

Who says you need to dress like a girl to be sexy? Certainly not Sif, longtime beloved of the mighty Thor. In fact, by the looks of her, just the opposite is true – she'd be drop-dead gorgeous in a burlap sack.

Luckily for us, though, there's no burlap in Sif's wardrobe today – just this stunning number, which serves her equally well on the fields of battle as it does in the courts and chambers of Asgard's palace royal. Red and white are definitely Sif's colors, and her black boots and gloves contrast perfectly with her ebony hair. (Can you believe this woman used to be a blonde?) And those legs … don't get us started on those legs. We can see why Thor has carried a torch for her for so long.

It's easy to perform your duties as Asgard's premier shieldmaiden when you look this good. Ably rendered here by Thor guru **WALT SIMONSON**, Sif can command a legion, negotiate a treaty, or flat-out bedazzle a would-be suitor with equal ease. (Nobody tell Thor how we determined that last fact, though – we hear he's the jealous type. Yikes!)

From the Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe:
Deluxe Edition #12, November 1986

FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON:

LOKI

And here we see Loki, Lord of Lies, plotting yet another dastardly scheme. How can we tell he's plotting? Because he's awake. And if you don't believe us, just check out his choice of wardrobe: head-to-toe green, a sweeping golden cloak and two curved horns mounted on his forehead? If that doesn't scream "God of Mischief" to you, you need your eyes checked; dressed in this wicked finery, Loki is every inch a villain.

BEN AND RAY LAI illustrate a daring yet subtle update of Loki's standard outfit here. Note the fine workmanship on Loki's gloves, the alteration of the familiar yellow spiked cloth always found around his neck, and the addition of a sash and two tiny demon skulls on Loki's shoulders. Thor's mischievous half-brother has always had an iconic look, ever since Jack Kirby put pen to paper to design him – but these seemingly minor tweaks work wonders, elevating Loki visually from a scheming annoyance to an imposing, godly threat. This is Loki in all his evil glory.

From Thor: vol. 2 #64, July 2003

FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON:

HELA

Continuing our look through Thor's foes, we now come to Hela – dread ruler of the Asgardian Underworld. Like Loki, she too wears green from head to toe, but with an ebony cloak that has cast the shadow of death across many a battlefield. Multiple sets of elongated horns sprouting from her helmet add to her menace – making it clear to even a casual observer that this is a god not to be trifled with. And although the many zig-zags and light green patterns on her garment have a purpose … yea, a dire, sinister purpose indeed … none may know of it and still remain among the living. (Or maybe she just likes them. We'd ask her, but we doubt we'd be able to report our findings afterwards.)

ART ADAMS does a bang-up job here rendering Jack Kirby's original design for the Queen of the Underworld. You'd think that someone who dwells in a realm of pain and fire would dress in red or black – or, indeed, anything other than green – but Hela's regal bearing, menacing presence, and the air of pure, chilling fear that she can generate with but a single, withering glance allow her to pull off her chosen look … with style.

If looks could kill, right?

From Uncanny X-Men: Annual #9, November 1985

From Journey Into Mystery: #103, April 1964

FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON:

AMORA THE ENCHANTRESS

Amora, the Enchantress, has long bedeviled both Thor and his companions in the Avengers – her seductive wiles and Asgardian magic making men her slaves, ready and willing to do her nefarious bidding. And looking the way she does above, we can see why she's so good at it! Heck, we're ready to do her bidding right now, and we know she's just a comic-book character!

(But what's this? Another villain wearing green? All the evil Asgardians must go to the same tailor, and he must not have that much imagination. Striking and intricate the outfits worn by Thor's mortal foes may be, but their color scheme could use some variety.)

Though the Enchantress has worn many outfits over the years in her long quest to seduce the God of Thunder and win his heart, she keeps drifting back to this one – and we can see why. Those circles on her legs, the low-cut top, that intricate headdress … it's a classic, elegant design. **JACK KIRBY** knew just what to accentuate when he dreamed up Amora – sex appeal, scheming ambition, and *danger*. Mortals and gods alike – beware!

FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON:

HOGUN & FANDRAL

Hogun and Fandral, two of the famous Warriors Three, couldn't be more dissimilar on paper. Grim Hogun rarely smiles, his cynical, serious demeanor on display during every battle – and Dashing Fandral treats each battle as a light-hearted adventure worthy of song, celebration – and women! But put these two sword-brothers back-to-back against an oncoming army, and you'll find no more unified fighting force in all of Asgard.

Perhaps they work so well side by side because of their contrasts – even visually, they complement one another. Hogun, with his furry white horned hat, thick blue garment and wild goatee, resembles a marauding Mongolian from ancient China. And Fandral, with his charming smile, golden pointed moustache, flashing blade, and fur-trimmed tunic, brings to mind nothing less than Robin Hood himself. Both iconic images in their own right, both bringing to mind two very different types of warrior from two very different eras – and yet, when put next to each other, adventuring side-by-side, they somehow look completely normal and right. Once again, the artistic instincts of **JACK KIRBY** were right on the money – Hogun and Fandral are two of the visually simplest, yet most beloved and enduring, contributions that Jack made to Thor's extended family.

From Thor: #139, April 1967, and Thor #155, August 1968

FASHION SPOTLIGHT ON:

VOLSTAGG

And finally, we come to the other half of the Warriors Three – Volstagg the Voluminous, self-proclaimed Lion of Asgard. Oh, Volstagg, we don't know where to begin with you. First of all – purple and yellow? Why purple and yellow? You weigh one thousand pounds and you have bright red hair – which god or godling suggested that you drape yourself in purple and yellow, and have they died from laughter yet?

Secondly, Volstagg, let's talk about that hat. It's a fez with feathers coming out of it. Topping that mountainous frame of yours, it's the finishing touch in making you look exactly like an eggplant. A seven-foot-tall eggplant with little legs.

Thirdly – I hate to do this, Volstagg, but somebody's got to say it: *you have food in your beard.*

In all seriousness, though, folks, Jack Kirby created a heck of a comedic foil in Volstagg. Ever ready to fall over, bump and break something, or fall asleep on guard duty, Volstagg is the perfect counterpart to Hogun and Fandral – and visually, he hits the mark on every single level. He's top-heavy, garish, and unmistakable on the printed page. He hasn't really ever changed that food-stained purple tunic – forty years later, folks like **ERIK LARSEN** are still drawing faithfully from the same old model – but why bother changing the big oaf? Jack got him right the first time.

From Thor: vol. 2 #28, October 2000

THE MASTERWORKS

A Gallery of the Greatest Thor Art

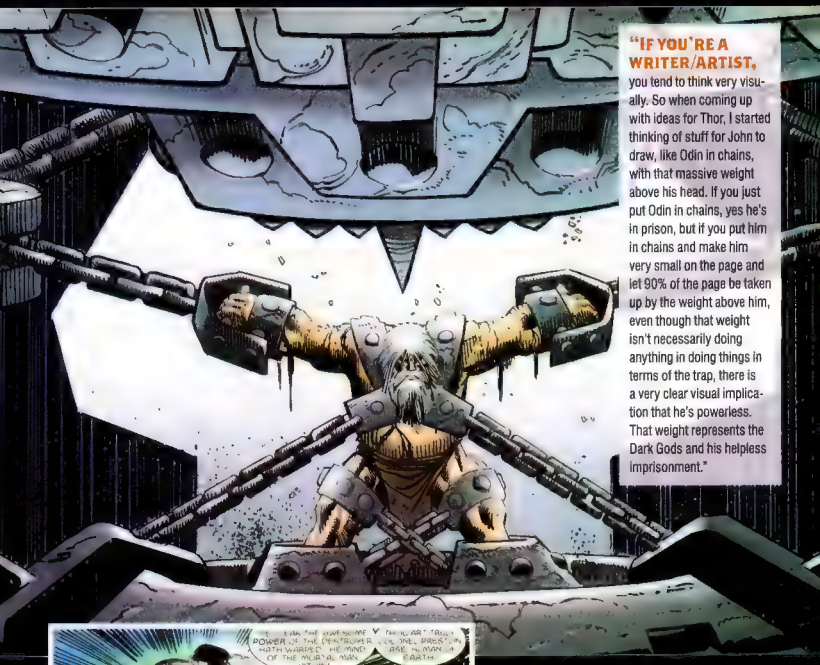
JOHN ROMITA, JR.

Writer DAN JURGENS brings *Spotlight* readers up close to the amazing Thor art of JOHN ROMITA, JR. in this special installment of our Masterworks commentary series!

The triumphant return of the Avengers and the FF to the Marvel Universe in 1998's Heroes Return event drew some top talent to collaborate on several fondly remembered runs - and Thor was no exception. Combining the talents of writer/artist Dan Jurgens with the knockout combo of penciller/master storyteller John Romita, Jr. and inker Klaus Janson, his revival would take Thor fans to heights as high – and sometimes higher – than evergreen runs by Lee/Kirby and Walt Simonson!

At the time, there hadn't been a regular Thor title for almost two years, as the character had been ushered into the pocket universe of Heroes Reborn. And who better to visualize a Marvel heavyweight like Thor – a character that carried with him all the credentials of an immortal - but John Romita, Jr.? His success at portraying the pantheon of gods in the DC/Marvel Amalgam title *Thorion*, which blended Asgard with Jack Kirby's *Fourth World*, was such that Romita, Jr. was editor Tom Brevoort's first choice for art chores on Heroes Return *Thor*. Dan laughs as he recalls the moment Tom filled him in on the identity of his art partner. "My basic feeling was if you're gonna offer me *Thor*, and you're offering me JR, that certainly becomes a thing where I say, 'Tom, you're not gonna have to twist my arm here.'"

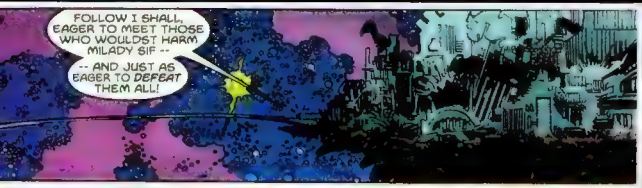
I'm sure we're not going to have to twist your arm to turn the pages in this barnburner of an art gallery! We've lined up some choice examples of JR's work over the first 13 issues of *Thor*, with commentary from the man who lived it with him, writer Dan Jurgens. Take it away, Dan!

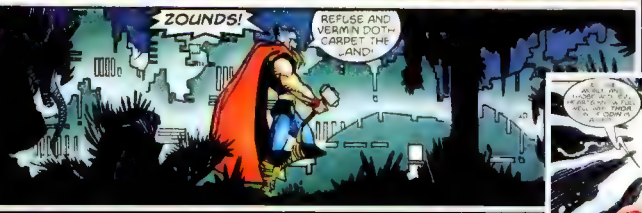


"IF YOU'RE A WRITER/ARTIST, you tend to think very visually. So when coming up with ideas for Thor, I started thinking of stuff for John to draw, like Odin in chains, with that massive weight above his head. If you just put Odin in chains, yes he's in prison, but if you put him in chains and make him very small on the page and let 90% of the page be taken up by the weight above him, even though that weight isn't necessarily doing anything in doing things in terms of the trap, there is a very clear visual implication that he's powerless. That weight represents the Dark Gods and his helpless imprisonment."

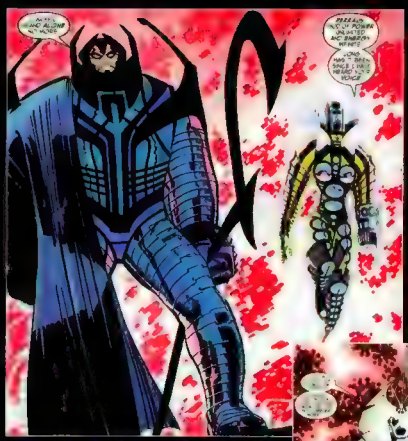
POWER OF THE DESTROYER HATH WARPED THE MIND OF THE MORTAL MAN WITHIN!
THERE ARE TRULY FEW WHO POSSESS SUCH A MAN AS THIS EARTH

"IN TERMS OF VISUALS, one of the things I always knew that we were going to have to have beyond a shadow of a doubt was John drawing the Destroyer. I knew that going in before we even plotted the first issue - from the first time my fingers hit the keyboard - that we had to have John drawing the Destroyer. That's why we snuck him in early, to give everybody the taste of it and then we had him become a bigger player later on."





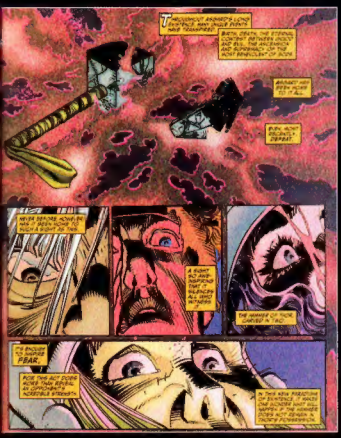
"HERE'S A NICE COMPOSITION BY JOHN. The first panel is a very wide shot of Asgard, then to a super-tight shot on Perrikus to a sort of medium-wide on Thor. There are a lot of guys who simply don't move the camera around to that extreme, which is unfortunate because it's one of the greatest tools you have as an artist. You can go up, go down, you can pull it in tight, you can really move it around - John is more than willing to do that."



"WITH HIS CHARACTER DESIGNS, I think that what John put together visually was a group of characters that fit the title of both 'Dark Gods' and gods who had a solidly 'new' feel to them. In other words, if we go back to what comics were at that time, in 1998, his characters felt very John-like. But at the same time, they were appropriate to Thor, in that they touched on the heritage of the Thor visualizations that Kirby came up with while at the same time feeling new, and I think that was the key to the Dark Gods."

"THE ASPECT OF GODHOOD WAS one that would stay constant from issue 1 through to my last issue of the series. I think this was something where JR was absolutely critical. Especially when he first appeared in the first issue, JR's Thor had that sense of majesty and power, so when he landed in the streets it visually spoke to readers, "I am a god from Asgard!" The people on the streets could doubt it if they wanted, and I think that is something we wanted to play around a great deal with, but from panel 1, JR's Thor *felt* like a god from Asgard. And obviously throughout the entire run, that was always principal: that if you're gonna have the Marvel Universe where you say there is a pantheon of gods who regularly visit Earth, they've *gotta* be gods! They can't be just big guys wearing cloaks. And I think John conveyed that."

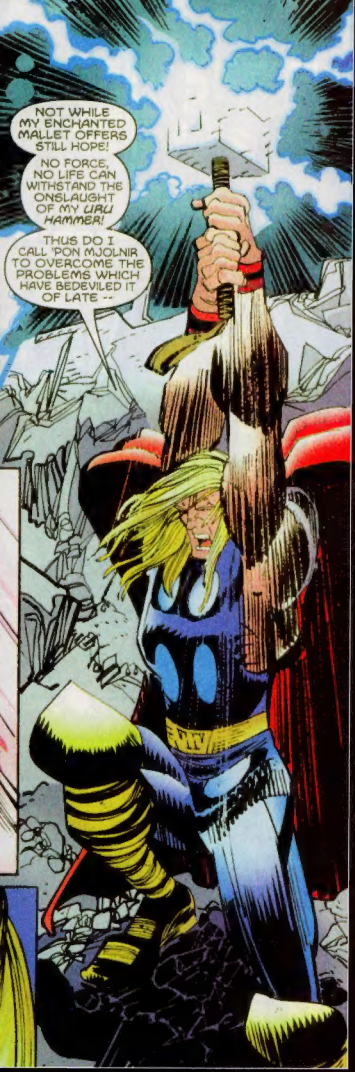
"WHAT I WANTED AT THAT POINT OF THE STORY was a really ultra-dramatic beat. As I recall, I don't think I necessarily told Tom about that beforehand. Maybe I did, but I just remember that when the plot went in, Tom called me up and screamed, *'You cut Thor's hammer in half!'* I said, 'Yeah!' (*Laughter.*) I just thought it was logical to the story, logical to where we were with Thor and the Dark Gods, and it was that moment that elevated the Dark Gods to heavyweight villain status, and this was what I was shooting for."



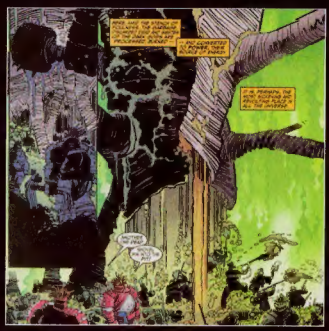
WHILE THOU ART UNARMED --
-- LET THIS BATTLE END, FOR NO FORCE, NO MAN --
-- CAN WITHSTAND THE AWESOME POWER AND MIGHT OF THE HAMMER OF THOR!
WRONG!
KA-BOOM

"IF YOU GO ON TO THE SEQUENCES on the following page, where you start to balance into close-ups of each of the individual characters, in terms of pacing a story what you're doing at that point is slowing down time. This is the method by which comics move into slow motion. As I recall that is something that I knew we wanted to do and I said, 'Let's really highlight on the emotion of the scene here with lots of small, individual close-ups.' The emotion of the characters involved really sold the action and the gravity of what had just happened, and John handled that perfectly."

"WHAT WOULD BE INTERESTING IS IF YOU COULD SEE THIS PANEL IN BLACK AND WHITE, what you've got is obviously the clear delineation that the hammer is the light source. Energy is radiating from the hammer and that's why some of the linework is incomplete or shadowed. And what that serves to do is by putting the back of Thor's legs and the back of Thor in shadow, it gives his body absolute shape and mass, and that's what makes Thor feel more like a heavyweight. The fact that the hammer is the light source, well there's all sorts of things that go with that!"


NOT WHILE MY ENCHANTED MALLET OFFERS STILL HOPE!
NO FORCE, NO LIFE CAN WITHSTAND THE ONSLAUGHT OF MY *LIKU! HAMMER!*
THUS DO I CALL 'PON MJOLNIR TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE BEDEVILED IT OF LATE --

"AS THE READER, what you can sometimes see and not see is confidence on the page: the confidence of the creators that they're in synch and doing something right, and I really think that by the time we were getting to that last arc, you saw a group of guys – and I include Tom and Klaus and the colorist, who really knew what they were doing – we knew what our message was. We knew who Thor was, there was that absolute sense of confidence that I think really showed."



"JOHN TAKES US INTO THE NASTY, DISGUSTING SEWERS of the Dark Gods. He always does those little shadowy, slimy people very, very well."

SILENCE, VOLSA! YOU'RE ANNOYS ME!
HELA, SISTER OF DEATH, RULER OF THE SHADOW REALM.
I KNOW THEE WELL. THAT WAS I WHO ESCAPED THY ETERNAL GRASP IN THE PAST!

"I THINK WITH JOHN, IT GETS BACK TO STORY-TELLING and his commitment to it, and that certain sixth sense you have as an artist about what works and what doesn't, what you can do and what you can't do and who the character is....and one of the things I've told John in the past, I know he's done an incredible amount of very, very gorgeous Spider-Man work, but for my money, I think John was always born to draw Thor."

Thanks to Dan Jurgens for walking with us through some exemplary pages of his run on Thor *with John Romita, Jr. We pulled out some of the best pages, but for every great image you saw here, there are a dozen more to behold! As we wait for the Collected Editions Gods of Marvel to compile this epic run, truck on down to your local comic shop and investigate these hallowed halls of historic* Thor *comics for yourself! 'Nuff said!*

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